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AN IMPROVED U.S. PACIFIC COMMAND
THEATER DESIGN FOR THE FUTURE

by

Robert V. James III
LCDR USN

A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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Abstract of

AN IMPROVED U.S. PACIFIC COMMAND THEATER DESIGN FOR THE FUTURE

United States Pacific Command has based its deterrent and response capabilities on the forces concentrated in bases in South Korea and Japan. While these bases are certainly essential to deter aggressive action on the part of North Korea, they are positioned poorly to shape or respond to other portions of PACOM's theater, in particular the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia. Potential crises in these regions are evident when one considers recent events such as the Indian nuclear bomb tests, instability in Indonesia due to the economic crisis, and conflicting territorial claims for the Spratly Islands.

The National Security Strategy for the United States emphasizes engagement, shaping, responding, and preparing now. To execute this strategy and better prepare for an uncertain future, PACOM should pursue the establishment of a naval base in Singapore. Singapore appears open to a U.S. presence and this location would be ideal for shaping and responding to events along the Indian and Pacific Ocean littoral. Singapore would also be an excellent location to ensure the security of the Straits of Malacca.

PACOM should also consider the effects of a reunification of North and South Korea or a demand by the Japanese government that U.S. forces in Japan be reduced. In this eventuality, a naval base in Singapore would provide a balanced U.S. presence in the Pacific theater and give PACOM enhanced flexibility for the future.

United States Pacific Command (PACOM) has perpetuated a theater design which does not adequately prepare for the uncertainty contained in the future. PACOM's current theater design concentrates the preponderance of PACOM's forward deployed forces in Northeast Asia. This alignment is a holdover from the cold war. PACOM should reevaluate its theater design and establish a forward naval base in Southeast Asia, preferably at Singapore, to establish greater balance in force disposition and to better anticipate the elevated potential for crises throughout PACOM's theater.

CURRENT THEATER DESIGN

Theater design is simply how the Commander in Chief (CINC) designs his theater so that he can execute his theater strategy. Specifically, the CINC must determine the type of military forces he needs, the quantity of those forces, and how those forces are to be positioned and staged to effect his theater strategy.

Since the Korean War the United States has maintained significant forces forward deployed in the Republic of Korea (South Korea) and Japan. During the Cold War there were significant reasons for maintaining this presence. In 1951, the United States-Japan Security Treaty was signed, permitting the use of Japanese bases by American forces to assist the war effort in Korea.¹ The American presence at these bases continued because of the Cold War threats posed by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), Peoples Republic of China (China) and North Korea, and because of American treaty commitments to Japan's defense.² Japan's geographic position was a perfect location for a forward base throughout the Cold War. From Japan, U.S. forces could monitor the Soviet Pacific Fleet,

¹Morohiro Hosokawa, "Are U.S. Troops in Japan Needed?" Foreign Affairs, July/August 1998, 2.

²Ibid.

which posed a formidable blue water threat, support any contingency on the Korean peninsula and intervene in any overt action by the Chinese toward Taiwan. Also, the tense standoff on the Korean peninsula remained, necessitating a continued strong American presence in South Korea to deter a resumption of the Korean War by North Korea.

In addition, the United States has maintained forces forward deployed in other portions of PACOM's theater. During the Vietnam War there was a substantial build up of American forces in South Vietnam. By the early 1970's most American forces had left South Vietnam and in 1975 South Vietnam was over run by Communist North Vietnam. In the Philippines, the United States had maintained military forces for most of this century. Subic Bay was a standard stop for U.S. naval vessels on Western Pacific deployments. This presence also came to an end on November 24, 1992, when the last U.S. base in the Philippines was closed.³ Some U.S. forces have been stationed in Guam, which remains a strategic location with an excellent harbor and airbase.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union the environment in the Pacific has altered significantly. The Russian Fleet is but a shadow of its former self and poses no threat to the Japanese islands or any other nation in the Pacific.⁴ The United States embarked upon a post Cold War military drawdown, which significantly reduced the size of the U.S. armed forces. The perception of American withdrawal was reinforced by the closing of American bases in the Philippines in 1992. This new situation has caused many nations to discuss a potential power vacuum. LCDR Duk-Ki Kim of the Republic of Korea Navy writes that: "...some East Asian states are concerned about a possible power vacuum in the region absent a Russian naval presence, and with declining U.S. force levels...."⁵ Also, Alexander Chieh-Cheng

³Charles R. Larson, "Stay the Course in Pacific Theater," The Navy Public Affairs Library, <<http://www.chinfo.navy.mil/navpalib/intl/pacific/lars0302.txt>>, 9.

⁴Hosokawa, 2.

⁵Duk-Ki Kim, "Cooperative Maritime Security in Northeast Asia," Naval War College Review, Winter 1999, 53.

Huang from Taiwan states: "...the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the cutback of the U.S. military presence in the Western Pacific leave a naval power vacuum..."⁶

The forward presence of U.S. forces in the Pacific had a positive influence on maintaining regional stability. Regional stability had greatly facilitated investment and significant economic growth. Most East Asian nations, including China, wanted the U.S. military presence to continue to maintain this stability.⁷ The United States listened to the fears expressed by regional nations that a power vacuum was forming and responded in 1995 by committing to keep "approximately 100,000 troops in the region for the foreseeable future."⁸ These troops are primarily stationed in South Korea and Japan. The United States has determined that these bases "remain the critical component of U. S. deterrent and rapid response strategy in Asia."⁹

BASIS FOR THEATER DESIGN AND THEATER STRATEGY

To build a theater design for U.S. Pacific Command, it is necessary to first determine what objectives and goals have been provided by higher authority. A National Security Strategy For A New Century, promulgated by the White House in 1997, emphasizes engagement. This document describes engagement as being "imperative" for the U.S. strategic approach and states that "American leadership and engagement in the world are vital for our security..."¹⁰ The words "imperative" and "vital" reflect how strongly the

⁶Alexander Chieh-cheng Huang, "The Chinese Navy's Offshore Active Defense Strategy: Conceptualization and Implications," Naval War College Review, Summer 1994, 28.

⁷Hon K. Lee, "China in the 21st Century: America's Greatest Challenge," in Essays on Strategy XIII, ed. Mary A. Sommerville (Washington: National Defense University Press, 1996), 103.

⁸"The United States Security Strategy For The East Asia-Pacific Region 1998," DefenseLINK, <<http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/easr98/>>, 2.

⁹*Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁰William J. Clinton, A National Security Strategy For A New Century (Washington: The White House, May 1997), 2.

National Command Authority believes engagement is necessary for our national security. This report identifies three themes to be used in executing the American National Security Strategy. First, shaping the international environment to enhance U.S. interests and security.¹¹ Second, responding to crises by “focusing on challenges that most directly affect our interests and engaging where we can make the most difference.”¹² Third, preparing now for tomorrow’s uncertain future.¹³ The shape, respond and prepare now buzzwords have become standard lexicon when describing the U.S. National Security Strategy and are also a key part of the National Military Strategy.¹⁴

The White House revised the National Security Strategy in 1998, but made few substantial changes. U.S. engagement and leadership remained central to the American strategy.¹⁵ The 1998 National Security Strategy did provide more emphasis on combating international terrorism, crime and “America’s profound interest in the health of the global economy to provide jobs and opportunity at home.”¹⁶ The Secretary of Defense also emphasized engagement in the United States Security Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific Region 1998. “The intention of the United States is to help dampen the sources of instability by maintaining a policy of robust engagement, overseas presence and strengthened alliances, while searching for new opportunities to increase confidence and a spirit of common security.”¹⁷ This report elaborates further by outlining more tangible regional objectives:

- 1.) Maintaining and strengthening ties with Japan, the Republic of Korea, Australia, Thailand and the Philippines,
- 2.) Comprehensive engagement with China,
- 3.) Broadening Cooperation with Southeast Asia and Indonesia,

¹¹Ibid., 6.

¹²Ibid., 9.

¹³Ibid., 13.

¹⁴John M. Shalikashvili, National Military Strategy of the United States of America (Washington: 1997), 1.

¹⁵Press Secretary. Statement, “1998 National Security Strategy Report,” White House Publications, 30 October 1998, <<http://www.pub.whitehouse.gov/retrieve-documents.html>>.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷“The United States Security Strategy For The East Asia-Pacific Region 1998,” 3.

- 4.) Regional Cooperation with Russia,
- 5.) Enhancing Relations with Mongolia,
- 6.) Supporting the Development of Security Pluralism,
- 7.) Promotion of Democracy, and
- 8.) Preventing the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction.¹⁸

These objectives provide the basis for PACOM to use when developing its theater strategy and theater design.

CHALLENGES AND POTENTIAL CRISES IN PACOM'S AREA OF RESPONSIBILITY

When analyzing the design of a theater, it is also important to consider the known and potential challenges which are present in the theater. In PACOM's theater there exist a number of challenges and potential crises. First and foremost is the Korean peninsula. Since the conclusion of the Korean War, both North and South Korea have remained armed camps facing each other across the demilitarized zone. South Korea has grown into a modern, industrialized nation, while North Korea has sunk into economic despair. "Deteriorating economic conditions, including its food shortage, have raised troubling questions about future developments in North Korea."¹⁹ PACOM's theater engagement plan working group correctly considers the Korean peninsula to be their "most immediate security concern."²⁰

The situation between the People's Republic of China and Taiwan remains unresolved. China is opposed to a separate and independent Taiwanese state and is anxious over independence movements in Taiwan. In March 1996, China attempted to influence

¹⁸Ibid., 1.

¹⁹Ibid., 12.

²⁰Slide titled "Situation Theater Conflict Sources," from "Engagement Working Group #1, 17-19 NOV 98," USPACOM J56 Homepage.

<http://164.213.23.19/j56/J56_P_TEPS_HomePage/J56_P_TEPS_HomePage.htm>

Taiwan using missile launches and naval maneuvers. The United States responded by sending two aircraft carriers to the area and China desisted.²¹

A significant territorial dispute exists between China, Vietnam, Malaysia and the Philippines over the Spratly archipelago. It is believed that the seabed around these islands contains rich natural resources, prompting the rival claims.²² "From the standpoint of regional security, the adamantness of rival claimants....continues to make this maritime zone a brewing flashpoint."²³

Burma and Cambodia continue to be potential hot spots. The government in Burma is considered a repressive regime, as evidenced by numerous refugees who have fled the country. In response, the United States has applied economic sanctions to Burma.²⁴ Drug operations in the Golden Triangle of Burma, Thailand and Laos are a significant concern²⁵ and piracy has been a problem throughout Southeast Asia and East Asia.²⁶

In 1997 an economic crisis developed in Asia which "sent shockwaves around the globe" and "has endangered the emerging middle classes in Thailand and Malaysia as well as in the northern Asian economies."²⁷ Japan has been effected as well due to the "large debt exposure of its banks in Southeast Asia."²⁸ The first phase of the crisis is considered over, but further difficult times are expected as countries implement International Monetary Fund (IMF) reforms. These reforms are expected to be a significant political test for the governments in the region since the "IMF expects real GDP declines of 3.1% in Thailand,

²¹Chas. W. Freeman, Jr., "Preventing War in the Taiwan Strait," Foreign Affairs, July/August 1998, 6-7.

²²Michael Studeman, "Calculating China's Advances in the South China Sea: Identifying the Triggers of 'Expansionism'," Naval War College Review, Spring 1998, 69.

²³*Ibid.*, 68.

²⁴"The United States Security Strategy For The East Asia-Pacific Region 1998," 17-18.

²⁵Larson, 10.

²⁶Kim, 65.

²⁷"U.S. Economic Relations with East Asia and the Pacific," Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, U.S. Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/www/regions/eap/fs-us-eap_econ_rels_981026.html>, 1.

²⁸*Ibid.*

5.0% in Indonesia and 1.2% in Korea” and because “unemployment and inflation have risen more rapidly than initially predicted.”²⁹

Of the nations adversely affected by the Asian economic crisis, Indonesia is in the most precarious position.³⁰ “Widespread civil unrest, rioting and public pressure led” to the resignation of President Soeharto.³¹ Considering the hard economic times ahead for Indonesia and the social unrest, new President Habibie certainly has a difficult task in keeping the country together.³²

The economic and military growth of China warrants consideration. Although China is not considered a direct threat to the United States, many regional leaders are concerned.³³ A South Korean naval officer writes, “...except for the Korean Peninsula, current security concerns in Northeast Asia are focused on China’s developing power-projection potential”³⁴ and “it is significant that China has been engaged in such an arms buildup, in view of the relative decline in the military threat.”³⁵ The general perception is that the Chinese have embarked upon a long term building and acquisition program to develop a blue water navy.³⁶ This perception was created in part by a Chinese attempt to purchase the ex-Soviet aircraft carrier Varyag in 1992³⁷ and subsequent purchases of Russian Kilo class diesel submarines and Sovremenny class destroyers.³⁸ One author has presented the case that China plans on expanding its control of the seas outward in stages, first to an island chain consisting of “the Aleutians, the Kurils, the Japanese archipelago, the Ryukyus, Taiwan, the Philippine

²⁹“Chapter 1: Economic Turbulence in Asia” from “Asia Pacific Economic Update 1998,” USPACOM Homepage, <<http://www.pacom.mil/>>, 6.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹“Background Notes: Indonesia, October 1998,” Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs U.S. Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/www/background_notes/indonesia_1098_bgn.html>, 4.

³²Ibid.

³³Slide titled “Situation Military Overview,” from “Engagement Working Group #1, 17-19 NOV 98.”

³⁴Kim, 54.

³⁵Ibid., 58.

³⁶Richard Halloran, “China: Restoring the Middle Kingdom,” Parameters, Summer 1998, 67; Huang, 8.

³⁷Huang, 7.

³⁸Kim, 58.

archipelago, and the Greater Sunda Islands” and later to an island chain “composed of the Bonins, the Marianas, Guam and the Palau group.”³⁹

A last concern is shared by both PACOM and U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM). Since its independence, India has been involved in several disputes and altercations with Pakistan and China.⁴⁰ Differences of opinion, especially over borders, remain between India and both China and Pakistan. The magnitude of these differences was elevated significantly during the summer of 1998. In May of that year both India and Pakistan detonated nuclear devices and declared themselves nuclear powers.⁴¹

OPERATIONAL FACTORS AND MARITIME THEATER DESIGN ANALYSIS

As can be seen on the map in figure 1, PACOM’s theater is extensive and is certainly considered a maritime theater. Consisting of almost the entire Pacific and Indian Oceans, the seas between, and the numerous islands and archipelagos of Southeast Asia, Oceania and Northeast Asia, the importance of naval forces and their disposition is critical.

To assist in developing the design of a maritime theater, it is useful to consider the operational factors of space, time, and forces,⁴² and the applicable elements of a maritime theater: position, base of operations, physical objectives, decisive points, lines of operation and lines of communication.⁴³

The first operational factor, space, is extremely important. The extent of PACOM’s theater encompasses a large portion of the globe. Table 1 shows the vast distances across the Pacific and Indian Oceans when traveling between major ports. With this large amount of international air and sea space, there is ample room for naval and air forces to maneuver and

³⁹Huang, 18.

⁴⁰Jaswant Singh, “Against Nuclear Apartheid,” Foreign Affairs, September/October 1998, 45.

⁴¹Ibid., 43-44.

⁴²Milan Vego, On Operational Art Third Edition (Newport: U.S. Naval War College, September 1998), 11.

⁴³Ibid.

multiple avenues of access for the United States to influence, or shape, activities ashore. Because of the convex shape of the Eastern, Southeastern and Southern coast of Asia, the United States can utilize its naval and air forces from an external position.⁴⁴ The position of Australia could threaten this external position, but Australia is a modern and stable industrial nation and a close ally. The geographic position of Australia therefore supports, rather than hinders, the United States.

Because of the large distances involved, the operational factor of time is also extremely important. Whether using naval or air forces, the greater the distance, the longer it will take to respond. Furthermore, air forces will have less time on station. Therefore, to effectively execute the U.S. strategy of engaging, shaping and responding, the United States must maintain a forward presence in the Western Pacific. Forward presence is recognized and called for in each level of U.S. security strategy.

⁴⁴Ibid., 42.

DISTANCES BETWEEN MAJOR PORTS IN THE PACOM THEATER

Honolulu to:	Yokohama, Japan	3400nm
	Pusan, Korea	4000nm
	Guam	3300nm
	Singapore	5900nm
	Bombay, India	8300nm
	Aden, Yemen	9500nm
San Diego to:	Honolulu, HI	2300nm
	Yokohama, Japan	4900nm
	Pusan, Korea	5300nm
	Guam	5400nm
	Singapore	7700nm
	Bombay, India	10,100nm
Yokohama, Japan to:	Pusan, Korea	700 nm
	Guam	1400nm
	Singapore	2900nm
	Bombay, India	5300nm
	Aden, Yemen	6500nm
Singapore to:	Pusan, Korea	2500nm
	Guam	2600nm
	Bombay, India	2400nm
	Aden, Yemen	3600nm

Table 1⁴⁵

⁴⁵Wallace E. Tobin, III, The Mariners Pocket Companion (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1996), 85.

Although for the most part there is a vast amount of space in PACOM's theater, there are areas where space is somewhat constricted. The large number of islands in Southeast Asia channel access between the Indian and Pacific Oceans into certain sea lines of communication (SLOCs).⁴⁶ The Straits of Malacca are a key SLOC and should be considered a decisive point by PACOM.⁴⁷ Access to the Indian Ocean is vital to the U.S. strategy of engagement, especially toward India, and for PACOM to support CENTCOM in the Persian Gulf. Of equal importance, the Straits of Malacca comprise the economic lifeline for the industrialized nations in Eastern Asia. Approximately two hundred ships transit the Straits of Malacca each day and about half are oil tankers.⁴⁸ "Shipping traffic through Malacca is several times greater than traffic through either the Suez or Panama canals."⁴⁹ Considering the instability created in Eastern Asia by the economic crisis and the added emphasis in the 1998 National Security Strategy Report on global economic health, PACOM should be actively engaged in ensuring the security of this strait.

Another area of constricted space is Northeast Asia. The United States is committed to the defense of both South Korea and Japan. Because of the close proximity of these nations to North Korea and China, the United States must keep forces in South Korea and Japan to serve as a credible deterrent and, if necessary, a timely response force.

Although any commander would normally prefer to have greater forces, PACOM has significant and adequate forces forward deployed. These forces are concentrated in Northeast Asia, and specifically in South Korea and Japan. In South Korea there are two fighter wings and one Army division. In Japan, there is one fighter wing, one airlift wing, one special forces battalion, one Marine Expeditionary Force, one carrier battle group and one amphibious ready group.⁵⁰

⁴⁶Vego, 51.

⁴⁷Ibid., 46.

⁴⁸Kim, 70.

⁴⁹Halloran, 67.

⁵⁰"The United States Security Strategy For The East Asia-Pacific Region 1998," 6.

The position of these forces in Northeast Asia is excellent for defending South Korea and Japan or responding to aggression against Taiwan, but poor for shaping or responding to a crisis in other portions of PACOM's theater, such as Southeast Asia or India. Maintaining a theater design with all forward deployed forces concentrated in Northeast Asia fails to prepare now for future contingencies. One such contingency is the potential rise in the blue water capabilities of the Chinese Navy. With American forward deployed forces concentrated in Northeast Asia, American lines of operation to respond to a crisis in Southeast Asia or the Indian Ocean would be stretched across the Chinese littoral and would be vulnerable to interdiction and thereby subject to Chinese influence. The increased Chinese naval presence would transform the U.S. position from external to internal, unless the United States shifted to even longer lines of operation stretching back to Hawaii.

Another contingency for which PACOM should be prepared for is the possible breakdown of civil control in Indonesia. The economic situation is bleak and social unrest has continued, as indicated by the heading of a New York Times article: "45 are Killed in Religious Rioting in the Spice Islands of Indonesia."⁵¹ Several insurgencies have been active in Indonesia, including the Free Aceh movement on Sumatra⁵² and an East Timorese independence movement on Timor.⁵³ The Aceh region on Sumatra is located near the western entrance to the straits of Malacca. If the violence associated with the Free Aceh movement were to spill over into the straits, the United States would need to act to ensure the safe passage of shipping. A scenario could easily be envisioned in which the United States escorts merchant ships as was done in the Persian Gulf during the Iran-Iraq War.

⁵¹"45 Are Killed in Religious Rioting in the Spice Islands of Indonesia," The New York Times, 23 January 1999, A5.

⁵²"Indonesia Cracks Down on Separatists In Sumatra, Killing 9," The New York Times, 5 January 1999, A3.

⁵³"Indonesia Says It's Ready to Give Independence to East Timorese," The New York Times, 28 January 1999, A8.

AN IMPROVED THEATER DESIGN

To best implement the National Security Strategy concepts of engagement, shape, respond and prepare now in the PACOM theater, PACOM should establish a naval base in Southeast Asia with a small U.S. naval presence. The naval force should be tailored such that it is more capable than any one Southeast Asian Navy, yet small enough that the local navies can relate to the American ships. A force consisting of one destroyer and two frigates would be ideal. Either a Spruance class or Arleigh Burke class destroyer would clearly be the most powerful single ship stationed in the region. The two frigates would be more comparable in size and capability to the frigates and patrol boats of local navies, facilitating combined exercises and operations.

Singapore would be the ideal location for this naval base. Positioned strategically at the eastern entrance to the Straits of Malacca, the presence of U.S. naval units would be a strong and visible commitment to the security of the strait. Most Southeast Asian nations are in favor of continued strong American presence in the Western Pacific to offset the growth of Chinese naval power or a re-emergence of Japanese military ambitions.⁵⁴ Singapore appears to be leading the way, announcing "that its Changi Naval Station, which will be operational in the year 2000, will be available to U.S. naval combatants and include a pier which can accommodate American aircraft carriers."⁵⁵ The time is right to pursue this opportunity since there are a number of advantages.

One advantage would be the flexibility a naval base in Singapore would offer. To prepare now for an uncertain future, PACOM must place itself in a position which creates opportunities. Singapore is centrally located along PACOM's section of the Western Pacific

⁵⁴Lee, 103.

⁵⁵"The United States Security Strategy For The East Asia-Pacific Region 1998," 6.

and Indian Ocean littoral. From Table I, distances from Singapore to Korea, Guam and India, are nearly identical. U.S. naval forces in Singapore could influence events in the South China Sea, the Indian Ocean, and be positioned to reinforce units in the Persian Gulf, if needed.

Another reason for a naval base in Singapore would be to gain a strategic advantage over China. China has become increasingly bold enforcing its claims on the Spratly archipelago in the South China Sea. There are concerns that as China improves its naval capabilities this trend may continue.⁵⁶ Stationing American naval units in Singapore would serve notice to Beijing that they must pursue a peaceful settlement for the disputed claims. It is also reported that "the Chinese are building a base in Burma close to India's Andaman Islands."⁵⁷ Although the ability for the Chinese to project naval power into the Indian Ocean will remain extremely limited for quite some time, the U.S. should not hesitate to position itself to counter or shape such eventualities.

As previously mentioned, Singapore is strategically located on the Straits of Malacca. An American commitment to the security of the straits would significantly help ensure both the political and economic stability of the theater. "Most countries in and around the region are heavily dependent on the sea lanes over which they trade."⁵⁸ A crisis which threatened the SLOCs in Southeast Asia and particularly the Straits of Malacca would cause oil prices to rise and would have a tremendously negative impact on the economies in the region. As emphasized in the latest U.S. National Security Strategy, maintaining a healthy global economy is in the nation's best interest.

Ensuring the security of the straits could also serve to limit the build up of regional navies and avoid a naval arms race. From 1985 to 1996 the defense budgets for most East Asian nations rose significantly. Thailand's defense budget rose 176%, Singapore's 230%,

⁵⁶Studeman, 86.

⁵⁷Lee, 86.

⁵⁸Kim, 54.

South Korea's 254%, Taiwan's 231% and Japan's 218%.⁵⁹ This growth in defense spending can be linked to the economic growth of the region and an enhanced desire to protect national shipping⁶⁰ in the absence of major maritime powers.⁶¹ A more significant naval presence by the United States among these Southeast Asian SLOCs can serve to reduce the build up of regional navies and allow those countries to concentrate their funds on economic issues, like recovering from the recent economic crisis.

American warships stationed in Singapore could also be used to track merchant ships transiting the region which are suspected of carrying weapons of mass destruction related technology or equipment.

While considerations posed by potential crises in the theater are definitely important, it is also important to consider future relationships with current allies which may change in the future. Although it is not expected that North and South Korea will unify anytime soon, it is better to be prepared now for this possibility.⁶² If the Korean peninsula did unify, the major justification for U.S. bases in South Korea and Japan would no longer exist. In fact, Korean unification may become contingent on a U.S. troop withdrawal from South Korea since the Chinese would be very uncomfortable having U.S. forces on the south side of the Yalu River.

Regardless of Korean unification, the Japanese may seek or demand a reduction of the U.S. presence in Japan. Japan has a strong military tradition and may desire to pursue a more active foreign policy. One Japanese naval officer stated that, "...Japan has taken a smaller political and military role than its economic power might allow,"⁶³ and "...the JSDF (Japanese Self Defense Force) should enlarge the scope of its operations, specifically to

⁵⁹Ibid., 58.

⁶⁰Ibid., 57.

⁶¹Ibid., 65.

⁶²Slide titled "Situation Assumptions," from "Engagement Working Group #1, 17-19 NOV 98."

⁶³Katsutoshi Kawano, "Japan's Military Role: Alliance Recommendations for the Twenty-first Century," Naval War College Review, Autumn 1998, 9.

include offensive operations to support U.S. forces within Japanese areas of interest.”⁶⁴ Statements such as these are sure to enhance the fears of people in China and Southeast Asia who remember Japanese occupation during World War II.

The Japanese may also have reasons other than national pride for the United States to vacate bases in Japan. A former Japanese Prime Minister has written, “The U.S. military presence in Japan should fade with this century’s end.”⁶⁵ He bases his argument on the substantially reduced international threat to Japan since the demise of the Soviet Union and the near internal collapse of North Korea.⁶⁶ He also cites the \$5 billion which Japanese taxpayers pay annually for American military bases.⁶⁷ It is not difficult to see how this could be a popular position in Japan, especially considering the troubles we had in Okinawa.

An American naval base in Singapore would be invaluable if there were to be a reduction in the U.S. presence in Northeast Asia. The carrier battlegroup in Japan could be moved to Singapore. Additionally, U.S. naval forces would prevent a resurgent Japanese Maritime Self Defense Force (JMSDF) from dominating the region. The loss of Air Force and Army bases in South Korea and Japan would be more difficult to replace. The United States currently has a memorandum of understanding with Singapore which allows the United States access to Paya Lebar Airport. U.S. fighter aircraft already deploy there periodically for exercises and perhaps a more permanent presence could be established.⁶⁸ The Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF), Army special forces battalion, and the remainder of the U.S. naval and air forces could be moved to Guam. Since PACOM’s theater is of a maritime nature, a continuous army presence would not be needed. In fact, it might be detrimental. Air and naval forces can influence events ashore but rarely can they occupy territory. Army units, on the other hand, can definitely control and occupy territory, which

⁶⁴Ibid., 18.

⁶⁵Hosokawa, 5.

⁶⁶Ibid., 2-3.

⁶⁷Ibid., 5.

⁶⁸“Background Notes: Singapore October 1998,” Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs U.S. Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/www/background_notes/singapore_1098_bgn.html>, 6.

may make regional nations uncomfortable. The forward deployed MEF should be capable of responding to most contingencies requiring a quick response. The remaining army units could be moved back to Hawaii.

There are some disadvantages to establishing a naval base in Singapore. The amount of host nation support that Singapore would provide is unknown. The positioning of U.S. forces in Singapore would not be received positively in China. Undoubtedly the Chinese would believe that the United States was attempting to surround them. Such a move may push China away from the United States and reduce our ability to engage them. It would be important for the United States to emphasize that our objective is a peaceful and stable region. Getting this message across to the Chinese would be a difficult diplomatic challenge. Lastly, there is the quality of life issue for American sailors. Overseas duty is normally not favored by American servicemen, especially those who have families.

CONCLUSION

The concentration of PACOM's forward deployed forces in Northeastern Asia certainly takes advantage of the generous host nation support provided by Japan and protects against aggression by North Korea. However, it does not adequately prepare PACOM to engage, shape or respond in the remainder of the theater. This deficiency is especially apparent considering the number of potential crises throughout the rest of the theater and the decisive importance of the Straits of Malacca. PACOM could significantly increase its ability to execute the National Security Strategy by redesigning its theater. Specifically, basing naval forces in Singapore would provide PACOM with greater influence throughout the theater, a more balanced force disposition and greater flexibility. We face an uncertain future. PACOM must prepare its theater now so that it will have the flexibility to handle the near term and distant challenges that the future will present.

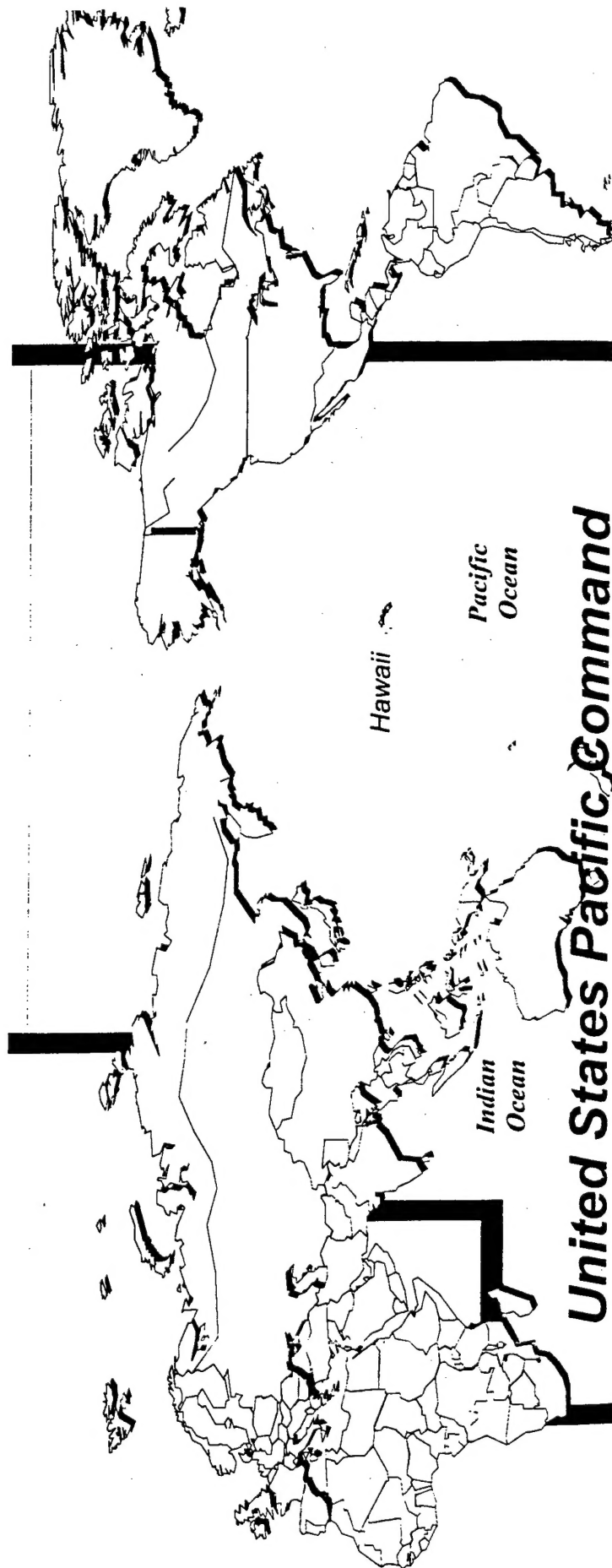


FIGURE 1

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